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A SERMON BEFORE THE PROVINCIAL SYNOD AT ANTRIM.

Preached *June* 1. 1698.

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BY

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Acts XV. 25, 26.

It ſeemed good unto us, being Aſſembled with one Accord, to ſend Choſen Men unto you, with our beloved Barnabas *and* Paul: *Men that have hazarded their Lives for the Name of our LORD JESUS CHRIST.*

AS the Church of Chriſt, ſince Militant on Earth, hath not wanted Foreign Adverſaries, who have *taken crafty Counſels to cut off the Name of Iſrael from being a Nation*; ſo it hath had Inteſtine Enemies, to its Doctrine, Worſhip, and Government; ſome privily bringing in Damnable Hereſies, *to over-throw the Faith once delivered to the Saints*, others corrupting its pure Worſhip, with Superſtition and Idolatry; and ſome Imperious and Ungovernable Men, ſubverting its orderly Government, by Tyranny and Anarchy. By any of which, tho' a Form of Godlineſs may be kept, it's Power is deny'd. But we have been faithfully fore-warned, that ſuch Offences muſt come, that ſuch as are approved may be made manifeſt: Yet He on whoſe Shoulders the Government of his Church is laid, hath well and wiſely provided proper Remedies againſt all theſe Evils, Watchmen and Rulers; who by their mutual Care and Counſels, aſſiſted by His Word and Spirit, are put in a Capacity to defend this Church: Whereof we have a pregnant Inſtance in this Scripture; in which we may ſee a wiſe and holy Aſſembly of Church-Rulers by joint Counſels and Authority, Deliberating about, and Determining of Ways and Means, neceſſary to preſerve the Purity of Doctrine and Worſhip, as well as the Unity and Peace of the Church: All which were in manifeſt hazard, while ſome

Men coming down from *Judea* to *Antioch*, taught the Disciples, *That unleſs they were Circumciſed, and kept the Law of Moſes, they could not be Saved.* Whether *Cyrinthus* was the Ring-Leader of this Party, as *Epiphanius* and *Hierom* report, I determine not; but it's evident from Verſ. 5. that they were Phariſees. The firſt courſe taken to remove this Evil, we find was *Diſputing*, managed by *Paul* and *Barnabas*, to convince theſe Gain-ſayers, but to little effect. And therefore ſecondly, The Church of *Antioch determined to ſend Paul and Barnabas, with certain others, to the Apoſtles and Elders who were at Jeruſalem*; where appears an Appeal from an Inferiour, to a Superiour Judicatory, in a Caſe not determined by the Inferiour. Thirdly, We have an Account of the Conſtitution of this Aſſembly, conſiſting of Apoſtles and Elders, both theſe reſident at *Jeruſalem*, and ſuch as were delegated from *Antioch*, Verſ. 6. Fourthly, The Method uſed to find out and determine this Controverted Truth, was, A Deliberate free and full debating the matter, and Reaſoning from Scripture. Fifthly, After this a clear and final Deciſion of the Controverſie; the Apoſtle *James*, as *Moderator* of the Aſſembly, ſumming up the Debate, and giving his Sentence, to which all conſented. Sixthly, We have here the *Synod*'s Method to make this its Deciſion effectual; where, 1. It is Enacted, That a Letter be written from the Synod, informing thoſe Churches to which it was ſent, with their final Determination and Judgment. 2. It is Enacted, That ſome Perſons be Commiſſionated to carry, publiſh, and require Submiſſion to this Decree.

The Words read, contain (1.) An Account of the Authority giving this Commiſſion, or Employing thoſe Perſons to Execute this Act, viz. the *Apoſtles, Elders, and Brethren*, aſſembled with one accord. (2.) The Perſons commiſſionated, to wit, *choſen Men, with Paul and Barnabas.* (3.) The ground of ſending, *It ſeemed good to us.* (4.) The Character and Recommendation of the Perſons ſent, which was their *Credentials*; 1. They were *Choſen Men*: 2. Men who had *hazarded their Lives for the Name of Chriſt.* From which words, thus Explain'd, this Propoſition may be rationally deduced.

Doctr.

Doctr. *When the Neceſſity or Benefit of the Church requires, it is the Duty of thoſe whom Chriſt hath cloathed with Authority to Rule it, to Aſſemble with one Accord, and make ſuch Acts as may contribute to preſerve the Purity and Peace of thoſe Churches over which the Holy Ghoſt hath made them Overſeers.*

That the Apoſtles and Elders did Aſſemble, is here Evident; that they did it as their Duty, from the preſſing Neceſſities of the Church over which they were ſet to watch, is alſo evident; both its Truth and Peace being in hazard: The preſence and concurrence of the Holy Ghoſt granted them, the Remarkable Succeſs by GOD's Bleſſing beſtowed on thoſe their Endeavours, ſhews us that they had a Call thereunto, and acted in obedience to GOD in it.

But that this may more fully appear to be, not only their Duty, but the Duty of all their ordinary Succeſſors, I ſhall firſt prove, ſecondly conſider what Aſſembly this was, for kind and quality, and then ſhew of what uſe it is to us.

1. I take it for granted, that the Church of Chriſt is and ought to be an Orderly Society of Reaſonable Men and Women, and under Laws and Government, and therefore is it called a *Kingdom*, whereof Chriſt is the *King and Lawgiver*, having Men in Authority under Him, enabled to put in Execution His Laws; it's call'd a *Family*, Eph.3.15. whereof He is the *Everlaſting Father*, Iſa.9.6. a *City* compactly built; all which ſhew that it conſiſts of Perſons Governing and Governed: For no ſooner do we hear of any Publick Worſhip, but we have it in a Society; *Cain* and *Abel* meeting to offer Sacrifice, and bringing them to be offered by *Adam*, the then High-Prieſt of his Family, *Gen.*4. Thoſe who will have Publick Worſhip Inſtituted, *Gen.*4.16. muſt underſtand Aſſemblies of diſtinct Families aſſociating; for no doubt *Adam* and his Houſe did before this jointly worſhip the LORD, and Nature's Light hath inſtructed all Nations who have any Worſhip, to perform it in Publick Aſſemblies.

2. It appears that under the Old Teſtament, GOD did require ſuch as He had Authorized to Rule his Church, to Aſſemble for that End, as appears from *Exod.*24.1. where the LORD ſaid to *Moſes*,

Moſes, Come up unto the LORD, thou and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and Seventy of the Elders of Iſrael; all which convened to be Witneſſes of, and concur with the Congregation in their ſolemn Engaging in Covenant with the *LORD*; as alſo to be Witneſſes of *GOD*'s Glorious Manifeſting Himſelf to *Moſes*, and giving him Authority, *Verſ.*10. and particularly to Judge and Determine in the Matters of Debate among that People, as appears from *Verſ.*14. That *GOD* conſtituted ſuch Aſſemblies, Rulers for ordinary, appears from *Deut.*17.8,9. where, in all Caſes too difficult for their Inferiour Judicatories, the People are commanded *to go to that Place which GOD ſhould chooſe to ſet His Name there, to enquire of the Prieſts, Levites and Judges, in thoſe Days*, and are Commanded alſo to be Determined by their Sentence. Seeing then the People were bound to Attend, it's evident the Prieſts, Levites, *&c.* were obliged to Aſſemble, to hear, examine and determine ſuch Matters as ſhou'd come before them: This ſame is clear from *Deut.*19. 16,17,18. Theſe Aſſemblies were Revived by good King *Jehoſhaphat*, according the *LORD*'s Appointment, 2 *Chron.*19. 8,9,10,11. *Moreover in Jeruſalem did Jehoſhaphat ſet of the Levites and the Prieſts, and of the Chief of the Fathers of Iſrael, for the Judgment of the LORD, and for Controverſies, when they returned to Jeruſalem, and charged them, Thus ſhall ye do in the fear of the LORD, and with a perfect Heart.* In *Ezra*'s Time, the Elders were appointed to meet at certain times, to determine the matter about Unlawful Marriages, *Ezra* 10.14. From all which is evident, 1. That as the *Iſraelites* were the Church of *GOD*, ſo they had Rulers Aſſembled for their Government. 2. That theſe were Church-Officers, Prieſts and Levites. 3. That the Matters they were concern'd in, were properly Eccleſiaſtical, as *Matters of the LORD*, diſtinct from the *Matters of the King*, 2 Chron.19. 4.The Laws by which they were to Judge. were Divine, *Deut.*17.11. 5.The End of ſuch Aſſemblies was the Preſervation of *GOD*'s Ordinances in their Purity, the Maintaining and Promoting of Peace and Holineſs.

2. But

2. But it is further to be conſidered, That this Law, by vertue whereof they Aſſembled, was not a meer Poſitive or Temporary Law, peculiar to that Church only, but a Law which Natures Light directs, and obliges us to obſerve; ſo it was neither Ceremonial nor Judicial, unleſs in ſome Circumſtances: For the Light of Nature being nothing elſe but the Dictate of Right Reaſon, diſcovering the Good or Evil of Mens Actions, according to their Agreement or Repugnancy to it; whatever is founded on, or harmoniouſly agrees with Right Reaſon, muſt be according to the Light and Law of Nature; which plainly teaches us, 1. That no Humane Society, Civil or Eccleſiaſtick, can ſubſiſt without Order and Government; *Ordo eſt Anima rerum*, ſaith the Philoſopher, *Order is the Soul of things*: And when there was no King in *Iſrael*, *then every Man did what was right in his own Eyes*: Then did the *Danites* ſet up Idolatry, *Judg.*18. Then did the *Benjamites* practiſe and patronize barbarous and inhumane Uncleanneſs, *Judg.*19. for which Divine Vengeance purſued all. 2. The ſame Light of Nature teaches us, That no Society can be preſerved without Laws Made and Executed by thoſe on whom the Government lies. Thus, all Humane Societies are Regulated by Laws proper and convenient for them; and if any thing be from the Light and Law of Nature, Laws, Law-Givers, and Law-Executors are. 3. Right Reaſon dictates agreeable to the Revealed Word of GOD, *Prov.*11.14. That *where there is no Counſel the People fall, but in the multitude of Counſellors there is Safety*; ſo hath GOD planted in the Natural Body Ears and Eyes to Inform and Direct, for the Preſervation of the Whole, and theſe He hath joyn'd together conveniently. And ſo the Seers hath He ſet in His Church, joyntly to employ their Skill and Gifts, for Prevention of thoſe Evils which might hurt the Flocks over whom they are Overſeers. 4. Natural Light informs us, That as Equals can have no Empire over one another, ſo Societies conſiſting of Equals, the Leſſer Number in all matters of Controverſie and Difference, ought to yield to, and be determined by the Greater or major part; according to

that Maxime, *Pars Major Jus habet Univerſitatis*, The Greateſt Part hath the Power of the Whole; And Civilians accordingly teach, That *refertur ad ſingulos quod publice fit per majorum partem*; It relates to All, what is done Publickly by the Greater Part; for otherwiſe Debates and Controverſies would be endleſs; and it is Irrational, that a Leſſer Number of Equals ſhould overrule or determine the Greater. 5. The ſame Light dictates, That in a Society conſiſting of many Particular Societies, a Subordination of Power is Neceſſary, by which an Injured Party hath the Right of Appeal, from the Lower to the Superiour; which Appeal is an Application from an Inferiour, or Incompetent Judge, to a Superiour or Competent Judge, containing a Complaint of Injury done; for conſidering the Corruption of humane Nature, Men are apt both to Do and Judge Wrong; and therefore the Learned *Whitaker* hath declared, *That Appeals are of Divine and Natural Right, and that moſt neceſſary in every Society, becauſe of the Ignorance or Iniquity of many Judges; for if Innocent Perſons might not Appeal under an Unjuſt Sentence, Honeſty and Innocency might be ruined.* Yet ſuch Appeals muſt not be Infinite, but muſt Siſt ſomewhere, and have their *Ne plus ultrà*, which is the Supream Authority of that Society. Seeing GOD then hath ſo well provided Civil Societies, with all that is Neceſſary, for their Safety and Proſperity, ſhall we think Him leſs concern'd for the *Church which He hath purchaſed with His own Blood*, and to leave it a confuſed *Chaos* or *Babel*, daily liable to many Diſeaſes, but provided with no Remedies?

3. As GOD hath Commanded, the Light and Law of Nature directed and Obliged Church-Rulers to Aſſemble for the afore-ſaid Ends, ſo this Law of Nature neither is nor can be Repealed under the New Teſtament; and therefore in obedience to it, *Miniſters* ſtand bound to Aſſemble for Preſervation of CHRIST's Vineyard: Thoſe who will Aſſert that this Law is Repealed, muſt tell by whom, when, and how it was ſo: But ſo far is it from being Repealed, that it is evident it cannot be; for a Law of Nature being in it ſelf Neceſſary, Juſt and Equitable, what would overturn ſuch a Conſtitution, muſt be Contrary,

trary, and ſo Needleſs, Unjuſt and Unequal: Yea, all that ever made ſuch Aſſembling Needful, is ſo ſtill; and where the Reaſon of a Law (which is *Anima Legis*) continues, that Law abides in its full force.

4. But ſo far hath our LORD and Law-Giver been from Abrogating this Law, that he hath under the New Teſtament Eſtabliſhed it, and that by preſcribing Church-Aſſemblies as a Remedy againſt Offences given: *Matth.*18.17. enjoyning the Injured to tell the Church; and in caſe of not hearing the Church, that ſuch be counted as Heathens or Publicans. I am not ignorant of the great Diviſion of Thoughts and Tongues about this Text; all that I deſire from it, is what cannot reaſonably be deny'd: 1. That it is not a ſingle Perſon, or *Church-Virtual* as ſome Papiſts are pleaſed to ſpeak, for ſo the word never was, nor poſſibly can be taken, which ever imports an Aſſembly of Men. 2. This Church is ſuch as hath power to take Cognizance of a Complaint made to them, and to determine it, and to cenſure the Contemners and Neglecters of them, which our LORD would not have Commanded, had he not cloath'd them with Power to hear and judge. 3. This cannot be the whole Community of Believers, but a ſelect Society, and that, 1. Becauſe it is a Church to whom He hath given the Power of Binding and Looſing, *Verſ.*28. and whoſe Sentence he will ratifie in Heaven, which Power is apparently given to Church-Officers, and not to the Community, as appears by *Matt.*16.19. 2. Nor were the Church of Believers all to be heard, or could hear, as this Church is required. 3. This Church might conſiſt of two or three, for to ſo many is the Promiſe of hearing Prayer made, *Verſ.*19. and of Chriſts preſence in the midſt of them, *Verſ.*20. which is a Promiſe made to Church-Officers, as appears from *Matth.*28.20. to encourage them in their Miniſtry. 4. Nor is it a Church of Civil Magiſtrates, as *Eraſtians* teach: For then 1. The Apoſtle *Paul* hath not only not underſtood his Maſter, but expreſly contradicted him; for 1 *Cor.*6.1. he diſcharges all Saints to carry their Debates before Judges who were their Enemies, ſuch as Heathens and Infidel Jews were at that time: Nor

is

is it probable that CHRIST would direct His Diſciples in caſe of private Differences, to Jewiſh or Roman Magiſtrates, His and their profeſt Enemies. 2. If the Civil Magiſtrate muſt be here underſtood, Chriſtians had not ſuch a Church for 300 years after Chriſt, and ſo no Remedy in ſuch Caſes. 5. The matter appears here to be proper for the Cognizance of an Eccleſiaſtical Judicature, not being ſuch a Crime as was puniſhable by the Civil Judge, or for which Reſtitution was to be made, which is required in caſe of Injury done; but it was an offence which, tho' at firſt private, became Scandalous by the Perſons Impenitence and declared Rejecting the Admonition of two or three; and if CHRIST would have the Church told in caſe of offending a private Brother, and for reconciling them two, can we think he provided no Remedy for ſuch as by Scandalous Practices offend the whole Church; or appoint means by which ſuch Offenders may be Reconciled to the Church? Seeing then there is here a Church Authorized to hear and decide Differences, verſ. 17. cloathed with a Power of Binding and Looſing, *Verſ.* 18. having a Promiſe of hearing their Prayers, and of His Preſence in performing their Duty, *Verſ.* 19, 20. we have cauſe to believe that this was a Church-Aſſembly of CHRIST's own Appointment.

5. The Apoſtles ordinary Practice of Aſſembling as they had occaſion, informs us, That they look'd upon it as their Duty, which preſuppoſeth a Law; and therefore they are Patterns to us in ſuch Aſſemblies: Upon the Apoſtacy and Death of *Judas*, one of the Twelve, after CHRIST's Aſcenſion, we find them Aſſembled to Elect and Ordain another Apoſtle in his room, *Acts* 1. Again, We find them Aſſembled to Ordain Deacons, *Act* 6. And in *Acts* 11. we find them convened and calling the Apoſtle *Peter* to an Account for his Converſe with the Gentiles. But here more remarkably the Church-Guides are Aſſembled to root out a Hereſie, and to prevent a Schiſm ariſing in the Church of *Antioch*.

And this leads me to conſider what kind or ſort of Aſſembly this was. That CHRIST and His Apoſtles framed the Government

ment of the Chriſtian Church according to the Model of the Jewiſh, is generally aſſerted and believed, and may ſafely be allowed, but for this Reaſon, (neither to preſerve the Ceremonial nor Judicial Laws) but becauſe the Government of that Church, for its ſubſtance, was agreeable to the Light and Law of Nature, and ſo was Divine and Imitable, as being Irreverſible. Now it's generally held that the Jews had three ſorts of Aſſemblies or Church-Rulers, and all agreeable to the Light of Nature.

1. As they had their Synagogues or Parochial *Congregations* for ordinary Moral Worſhip, ſo theſe Synagogues had their Rulers, *Acts* 13.15. And 'tis probable, as is reported, that in every City where were ten wiſe Men (as there was ſuppoſed to be in every place where was a Synagogue) that they did all jointly concur for Ruling the Affairs of the Synagogue, and ſo made a Parochial Conſiſtory, which did exerciſe Diſcipline on Scandalous Offenders, even to caſting them ſometimes out of the Synagogues. Now the common Light of Nature thus far directed all ſorts of ſmaller Societies, whether Politick or Eccleſiaſtick, to compoſe all particular and more private differences within themſelves, and to decide ſmall and eaſie Caſes by ſmall Judicatories for that end appointed; according to the Maxime, *Fruſtra fit per plura*, &c. 'Tis in vain to trouble greater Aſſemblies, in what can be as conveniently ordered by leſſer ones; So *Jethro*'s Reaſon taught him to give that good Counſel to *Moſes*, That certain Inferiour Judges might determine ſmaller Matters, reſerving harder Caſes for his own Audience, *Exod.*18.22, 26. And this became a Law, *Deut.*17.

2. As there were many Portions called *Thouſands in Iſrael*, Micah 5.2. ſo theſe Thouſands had their Government, and a Conſiſtory compoſed of Twenty Three, one of theſe being in every City, where were one hundred and twenty Families; and this is that, as many ſay, which was called by CHRIST the *Judgment*, Matth.5.22. and was made up of Fourteen of the Tribe of *Levi*, and Seven others of the Elders of the City; which alſo appears agreeable to the Light of Nature: For as particular Per-

ſons may ſtand in need of Government and Order, ſo particular Congregations, living contiguouſly, which as they may be injurious to one another, ſo they may be helpful to one another: And where matters occur of common Concern to the leſſer Neighbouring Societies, ſuppoſe in a larger City, the ſame Reaſon will allow and require the Rulers of that City to aſſociate for Government, that requir'd thoſe of a Village to meet: And ſo the Rule will hold good in this, *Quod omnes languit*, &c. What is of Common Concernment, ought to be Treated of by All Concerned; and this is ſuppoſed to be called the *Presbytery*, Acts 22. 5. which was a Society or Aſſembly diſtinct from the *Sanhedrim*; and ſuch an Aſſembly of Elders ſeems to have been at *Jeruſalem*, Acts 11.30. & 21.18.

3. The third ſort of Aſſembly was their *Sanhedrim*, conſiſting of Seventy Elders, with their *Naſſi* or Preſident, which was their Supreme Judicatory. If ſome alledge, Theſe were Civil Judicatories, they'll find themſelves miſtaken; for tho' they did concern themſelves in ſome matters Civil, yet they alſo had their Eccleſiaſtical Judicatories, acting by Divine Laws in matters Eccleſiaſtick: For tho' now it hold true, That *Eccleſia eſt in Reipublica*, The Church is in the Commonwealth, and not the Commonwealth in the Church; yet this will not hold good of the Jews, who were called to be a *Church* before they were framed into a *State*, and ſo the State came into the Church, and not the Church into the State. To accommodate this to our purpoſe, It's evident that this Aſſembly was neither of the former Two, but an Aſſembly of the Rulers of two Presbyteries, to wit, of *Jeruſalem* and *Antioch*, and ſo that which we call a *Synod*, whoſe Qualities come next to be conſidered.

1. It is to be enquired, Whether it was an Extraordinary Aſſembly, acting by Extraordinary and Apoſtolick Call and Authority, or an Ordinary Aſſembly, acting by an Ordinary Call, and Ordinary Church-Power? To this we ſay, 1. Tho' this Aſſembly had in it ſome Men Extraordinary for their Office and Gifts, yet did they not here meet or act as ſuch, but as Ordinary Church-Rulers, which as *Junius* hath well obſerved, ſo he hath

hath ſufficiently proved, That the Apoſtles in all Conſtituted Churches, did not act by Extraordinary Apoſtolick Authority, but Joint with other Church-Rulers in an Ordinary Power, and ſubmitted to them: Therefore we find the Apoſtles, *Peter* and *John*, ſent from the Church of *Jeruſalem*, as Miſſionaries, to *Samaria*, Acts 8.14. And as we from hence prove againſt the Papiſts, that *Peter* had no Supremacy over the reſt of the Apoſtles, becauſe the Senders have Power over them they do ſend; ſo their Subjection to that Church is hence evident: It's plain alſo from *Peter's* ſubjecting himſelf as aforeſaid, to the Trial of the Church at *Jeruſalem*: So *Paul* and *Barnabas* were ſubject to the Church of *Antioch*, as appears from *Acts* 13.1. and alſo from this ſame Chapter; which had not been, had they acted by their Apoſtolic Extraordinary Authority, wherein they were immediately ſubject to CHRIST only. But that this Aſſembly was Ordinary, is evident, 1. From its Occaſion, which is Ordinary, *viz.* a Hereſie and Schiſm ariſing in the Church. 2. Their Call to this Aſſembly was Ordinary, the Church of *Antioch* Determined and Ordered (*Verſ.*2.) *Paul and Barnabas, with certain others, to repair to Jeruſalem*; the Call of the Apoſtles and Elders at *Jeruſalem* was of the ſame nature, and therefore all but Ordinary. 3. Their Conſtitution was Ordinary, as conſiſting not of Extraordinary Officers only, but of Ordinary Elders and Brethren alſo. 4. Theſe Ordinary Officers act with equal Authority as the Apoſtles do in this Synod, the Synodical Act going out in their Name, as well as the Apoſtles, *Verſ.*22, 23. They joyn with them in cenſuring the Hereticks, *verſ.*24. *Verſ.* 28. They aſſert, *That it ſeems good to the Holy Ghoſt and us*, as well as the Apoſtles do; and here give Commiſſion to *Paul* and *Barnabas*, &c. as well as they. 5. The manner of their Procedure in determining this Controverſie, was Ordinary; not by Immediate Infallible Inſpiration, but by much Diſputing and Reaſoning, *verſ.* 7. the ſeveral Apoſtles giving their Judgment according to Scripture; wherein, tho' they were not contrary to one another, yet they differ'd, and the Sentence of *James* finally acquieſc'd in; not on account of Epiſcopal Authority

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(as ſome would have it, who to Exalt a Biſhop, would Degrade an Apoſtle) but on Account of the ſtrength of his Reaſons, and evidence of Truth from Scripture: And altho' it be ſaid, *verſ.* 28. *It ſeemed good to the Holy Ghoſt*, &c. it will neither follow that Oecumenick Councils are Infallible, as Papiſts teach, nor that this Acted by an Extraordinary Apoſtolick Spirit: For as *Whitaker* ſays, *Other Councils may in like manner aſſert their Decrees ſeem good to the Holy Ghoſt, if they ſhall follow the ſame Method and Rule, determine nothing but what is according unto the Revealed Will of GOD, written in His Word, which are called Words that the Holy Ghoſt teacheth*, 1 Cor.2.13.

6. Had the Apoſtles determined this matter by their Extraordinary Infallible Spirit, what need had the Infallible Spirit in *Paul* and *Barnabas*, to appeal to the Infallible Spirit of the Apoſtles and Elders at *Jeruſalem*? Was the Spirit in *Paul*, &c. an Incompetent Judge, and Inferiour to theirs? Nay ſurely, he might have as eaſily determined the matter at *Antioch*, and ſaved the Labour of Travelling to *Jeruſalem*. Whence 'tis plain they acted by Ordinary Means and Power, in dependance upon GOD's Spirit promiſed to His Church, by the beſt Rule, His own Word.

A Second Queſtion, Seeing this Aſſembly was Ordinary, Whether did it act only by way of Council and Advice, or by Juridical Authority, as an Aſſembly whoſe Authority obliged the Churches ſubject to them, to Receive and Obſerve them? To this we ſay,

1. That the Authority of this Synod, or of any other, is not Civil, either for Matter, Manner, or End, nor had it, or hath any External Coercive Power to inflict Puniſhments Corporal, or Fines and Impriſonments; but as their Power was Spiritual, ſo it was to be Executed by Suitable Means. 2. Nor was their Power (nor is the Power of any Synod) deſtructive of the Power of Inferiour Church-Aſſemblies, but perfective, and aſſiſting to them: For tho' a Superiour Aſſembly ſhould rectifie the Miſtakes of an Inferiour Aſſembly, this doth no more deprive the Inferiour of its Power, than he who would better inform a miſtaken Man, doth deprive him of the Power of his

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Judgment, when he only help'd him to judge better. 3. Their Power, as that of other Aſſemblies, was not Arbitrary, to do as they pleas'd, but Regulated by the Word of GOD; for no Aſſemblies have Power but for Edification; and no Foundation for this can be laid, but the Foundation of the Prophets and Apoſtles. 4. Yet we Aſſert, it was properly and truly cloath-ed with Authority to deliberate and determine in thoſe matters that were before it, and its Determinations (as thoſe of other Lawful Aſſemblies do) did oblige thoſe under their Care and Inſpection, Reverently to Eſteem them, and Dutifully to Obey them, as far as agreeable to the Revealed Will of GOD. And this is plain,

1. Seeing GOD hath Commanded Church-Rulers to Aſſem-ble, hath promiſed His Spirit and Preſence in their Aſſemblies, and to Ratifie what they Bind or Looſe, it is clear that their Acts ought to be Obeyed, elſe their Aſſembling is in vain; nor could Controverſies ever be ended, if none be obliged to ſtand to the Determination.

2. All Appeals ſhould be needleſs, tho' Nature's Light teach them: Were Synods only Conſultative, they ſhould be only like that which Lawyers call *Arbitrium boni viri*, which a Man need not ſtand to, unleſs he ſo pleaſe; and therefore all Power of Arbitration ought to have ſome Juridical Authority accom-panying it, to make their Determinations obey'd, elſe we ſhall be as when there was no King in *Iſrael*, and no effectual Means provided for the Redreſſing Grievances.

3. Seeing CHRIST requires that ſuch as neglect to hear the Church, be accounted as Heathens and Publicans, it is plain they have Authority, when ſuch as diſobey are to be puniſh'd for ſuch their Diſobedience: And its unreaſonable to ſuppoſe this peculiar to ſingle Congregations, for then CHRIST ſhould have had more care of ſingle Perſons, than of whole Congrega-tions of Men, if no Remedy be provided for Debates ariſing betwixt Congregations, or Offences done by one to the other: Yea even ſingle Congregations themſelves ſhould have no Re-

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medy, if one part be Injurious to the other, but they muſt Divide, and ſo be Deſtroy'd, as Inſtances could be given.

As to the particular Power exereis'd by this Synod, and may be by others, it appears to be firſt that called *Dogmatick*, which is not a Power to forge new Articles of Faith, or deviſe new Matter, or Parts of Divine Worſhip, but it is a Power to Explain Matters of Faith, and Rules of Worſhip, according to GOD's Word; to diſcover and declare the contrary Errors or Corruptions: Thus they detected and declared, and ſo by the Word of GOD prevented and removed, the Corruption both of Doctrine and Worſhip, which thoſe Phariſaical Men were bringing in, with a burden of Ceremonies; hereby they pacify and ſtrengthen the Church, by ſecuring to it that Liberty wherewith CHRIST had made it free. 2. They Exercis'd that Power called *Diatactick*, which relates to the External Order of the Church, in Matters Prudential and Circumſtantial, which are to be determined by the Light of Nature, and thoſe General Rules preſcribed in Scripture; ſuch as (1.) That our great and chief End be GOD's Glory, according to that 1 *Cor.*10.31. (2.) That no Offence be given to Jew or Gentile, or the Church of GOD, according to *Verſ.*32. (3.) That all be done for Edification, 1 *Cor.*14.26. (4.) And in Decency and Order, according to *Verſ.*20. By theſe Rules are Church-Aſſemblies bound to walk; which if they do, *Peace ſhall be on them*, as on the *Iſrael of GOD*. Thus, this Synod decreed to frame their Deciſion in a Letter, and to ſend it by fit Commiſſioners. 3. They Exerciſed that Power called *Critick*, or Diſciplinary, in Cenſuring thoſe Falſe Teachers as *Subverters of Souls*, *Men running vnſent*, *and Teaching what they had no Command for*, verſ.24. And ſo may Aſſemblies Uſe and Exerciſe Cenſures, provided it be done with Humility, Moderation, and Compaſſion; and ſo ſhall the Church be preſerved from Hereſie and Schiſm. This being our beſt Pattern, I come to make ſome Application to our ſelves.

Uſe 1.

Uſe 1. Seeing GOD hath Commanded, Nature's Light hath Directed, CHRIST's Precept and His Apoſtles Precedent hath Authorized Aſſemblies of Church-Officers for its Safety and Edification, we may meet in Faith, having the Authority of *GOD* for our Motive and Warrant ſo to do; and therefore may depend upon His Promiſed Preſence with us, and the hearing of our Prayers, ſeeing what we do, is not from a Principle of carnal Policy, but in Obedience to our Great Maſter, and for the Service of His Church under our care.

2. We are hence informed, That the want of a Call or Commiſſion to Aſſemble, from Secular Power, (we being permitted to meet) doth not make our Meeting Unlawful before GOD, as ſome may fancy; nor doth the want of a Civil Sanction to our Acts, make them void: For this Aſſembly had neither, yet was bleſſed of the LORD. The Civil Magiſtrate, we confeſs, may and ought to call Miniſters to their Work, and protect them in it; yet this is neceſſary only to the well-being, but not to the being of ſuch Meetings. The Primitive Church for the firſt Three hundred years Enjoyed no ſuch Priviledge more than we, yet wanted not their Aſſemblies, nor dare we condemn them as Unlawful; and as we have reaſon to bleſs GOD that we are Permitted to meet in Peace, tho' not Commanded ſo to do; let us, as we have hitherto endeavoured, ſo behave our ſelves, as to give no juſt ground of Offence; for ſure we can do nothing prejudicial to the Civil Intereſt, if we keep within our own Sphere, and purſue the juſt Ends of our Meeting, which are the Preſervation of Truth and Peace, and promoting Holineſs among our ſelves, and thoſe over whom the LORD hath ſet us; for certainly ſuch will be found the beſt Subjects, who conſcientiouſly mind theſe Duties.

3. Seeing GOD hath Commanded Miniſters to Aſſemble, when it is neceſſary, then ſuch ought to make Conſcience of Meeting when called, *and not to forſake the Aſſembling of themſelves together, as the manner of ſome is.* It's true, ſuch as GOD hath

Death Diſabled to come, are hereby Excuſed; *For the LORD Himſelf hath done it, and who may ſay, What doth He?* But thoſe who are able to go about their own particular Affairs, and yet excuſe themſelves from attending theſe our Aſſemblies, ſeem to mind more their own things than the things of CHRIST.

Some indeed deſpiſe theſe Aſſemblies, as being in their Opinion a Yoke, but we have cauſe to bleſs GOD for this Yoke, which ties us together, binds us to our Work, and ſtrengthens us in the Performance thereof; for by our Meetings GOD hath been pleaſed to preſerve us in as great Unanimity of Judgment, Unity of Affection, Uniformity in all our Miniſterial Actings, as any ſuch Number of ſuch Men we know in the like Circumſtances with our ſelves: By theſe, we have been helpt to mind the ſame thing, and walk by the ſame Rule; and by our united Care and Counſels in our darkeſt Times and greateſt Dangers, have been inabled both to avoid giving juſt ground of Offence, and have thereby defended our ſelves; our own, and the Publick Peace, have been conſiderably ſecured by theſe means, when it hath fared otherwiſe in other places: And Experience daily tells us, that the Church ſhall never be *Comely as Jeruſalem, Terrible as an Army with Banners*, while every ſmall Company with their ſeveral Captains, have ſole Juriſdiction, and no Common Councils kept for War or Peace, no Subordination or Authority for Exerciſe of Diſcipline, Redreſs of Grievances, or Eſtabliſhing of Order. Had ſome of our Brethren what we Enjoy by theſe, they would ſoon be more Terrible to their Enemies, more Comfortable to their Friends, more Peace ſhould be in their Palaces, and Proſperity within their private Walls.

4. This alſo may convince us that CHRIST never Appointed His Church to be Governed by Sole Juriſdiction of ſingle Perſons, for even in caſe of a private Offence, He commands to tell the Church, not any ſingle Perſon, howſoever dignified; the Promiſe of His Preſence is made at leaſt to Two or Three gathered in His Name, *Matth.* 18. 20. As the Apoſtles with the Knowledge and Conſent of the Church, choſe and ordained an Apoſtle,

Apoſtle, *Acts* 1. ſo they would not exerciſe ſole Juriſdiction even in the Ordination of Deacons, *Acts* 6. 3, 6. The Apoſtles joyntly ſent *Peter* and *John* to *Samaria*, *Acts* 8. 14. The Apoſtles and Brethren in *Judea* call'd *Peter* to Account, in reſpect of his Carriage to the Gentiles, *Acts* 11. 1, 2, 18. It was the Church, and not any one Church-man, that ſent *Barnabas* ſo far as *Antioch*, *Acts* 11. 22. Yea, the very matters of Charity were managed by Common Conſent, for the Diſciples in *Antioch* ſent to *Barnabas* and *Paul*, and *the Elders at Jeruſalem*; ſo that there was not ſo much as ſole Juriſdiction in the Diſtribution of the Churches Charity, *Acts* 11. 29, 30. *Paul* and *Barnabas* are ſent by the Miniſters of the Church of *Antioch* aſſembled, *Chap.* 13. And here it is more evident than to be deny'd: ſo that I would gladly know any Conſtituted Church within all the New Teſtament or Old, when Church-Juriſdiction was exerciſed by any ſingle Perſon. And ſeeing our Laws and Law-Givers have thought it unreaſonable and unſafe, to truſt the Legiſlative Power in the hands of any ſingle Perſon, or the Lives, Liberties, Limbs, or Eſtates, to any leſs than a Jury of Twelve Men, then is it reaſon to conſider of the Safety and Reaſonableneſs of truſting Church-Power in the hand of ſingle Perſons, who tho' they thruſt themſelves into Civil Aſſemblies, are ſeldom known to aſſemble as the Apoſtles and Elders did at *Jeruſalem*.

5. It is the Duty of Chriſtian People under the Care of ſuch Aſſemblies, Reverently to Eſteem, and Dutifully to Regard their Lawful Conſtitutions: So the Churches to which this Decree came, rejoyced for the Conſolation they had thereby, *Acts* 15. 31. As it's a People's Mercy to have Government, ſo none but Preſumptuous and Self-will'd Perſons will deſpiſe it, and profane Men, whoſe Immoralities make them juſtly obnoxious to their Cenſures.

6. Having ſuch an Excellent Example as this, let us imitate them in ours, and particularly in theſe things:

First, In their Unanimity : *They were Aſſembled with one Accord* ; they acted with one Accord, let us do ſo alſo. Their Unanimity appeared,

1. In that they were Acted by the ſame holy Spirit on which they depended, *verſ.* 28.

2. They walked by the ſame Rule, *Phillip.* 4. 16. Let us do ſo alſo : They had divers Apprehenſions and Expreſſions about the Rule, *much Diſputing and Debating*, not to confound, but to find out Truth, *to convince Gain-ſayers* : And therefore none ſhould be offended at our Debates, when managed with Moderation, in order to Confirm Truth, or Refute Error, or find out proper Expedients for our Work : The Matter about which, Perſons with whom, and our own Infirmities, occaſion theſe Debates ; We have no Intuitive Knowledge, but only Diſcuſſive, and therefore muſt *dig for Wiſdom as for hidden Treaſure.*

3. Let us with them mind the ſame thing, *Philip.* 3. 16. The Churches Preſervation and Edification, Truth, Peace, and Pure Goſpel-Ordinances, was all they Contended for, and Aimed at ; not, as ſometimes they had Contended, who ſhould be Greateſt, *Mark* 9. 34. By this Unanimity we ſhall Beautify and Fortifie our Aſſembly, gain Reſpect to our Perſons and Acts.

Secondly, Let us imitate them in the Ground and Reaſon of their Concluſions, *They determined nothing but what ſeemed Good to the Holy Ghoſt*, as well as them ; and this is beſt known by the Word of GOD. Let the things be neceſſary, *Verſ.* 28. No burdenſome Ceremony ; this they delivered the Church from, as *a Yoke which neither they nor their Forefathers were able to bear* ; for rigid impoſing of Things Unneceſſary, makes Church-Conſtitutions Contemptible, and the Contrivers and Impoſers of ſuch needleſs Burdens, as Imperious and Tyrannical.

4. Let us with them, what we have on due Deliberation Enacted, Execute with all prudent Expedition : A Flame was begun in the Church, they preſently ſent to quench it : Delays in this kind may prove dangerous.

5. Let

5. Let every Member of the Aſſembly, as they did, maintain the Credit and Authority of the Aſſembly, by a chearful Submiſſion and Obedience to its Appointments. *Paul*, *Barnabas*, *Judas* and *Silas*, tho' chief Men, did not decline, but Reverence the Authority of this Aſſembly, by undertaking a Toilſome and hazardous Work. Nature's Light teacheth us, that the ſeveral Parts of a Politick Body, as well as the Natural, are to be ſubject and ſerviceable to the Whole, and why not alſo in Church-Aſſemblies?

6. Let us imitate their Spiritual Prudence, in the chuſing and ſending Men to the Work that are fit for it; *They ſent choſen Men*, &c. As GOD hath intruſted us, we cannot be Faithful to Him, or thoſe with whom He hath truſted us, unleſs we employ fit Perſons. And therefore,

1. Let us be careful to lay hands ſuddenly upon no Man, that we be neither Partakers with them of their Sins, nor Authors of Plagues to others; but ſuch as are *faithful*, *able*, *and apt to teach*, let ſuch be choſen at firſt, 2 *Tim.*2.2. We injure the preſent, and betray the after-Generation, if we do otherwiſe.

2. Seeing there be diverſity of Gifts, we ought to make proper and ſuitable Application of thoſe to Places and Work; ſo is done here, *They ſent Choſen Men.* Nature hath taught every Mechanick not to uſe his Tools promiſcuouſly: GOD hath inſtructed the Plowman to Diſcretion, *not to threſh Fitches with a Threſhing Inſtrument, neither is a Cart-Wheel turned about upon the Cummin; but the Fitches are beaten out with a Staff, and the Cummin with a Rod*, Iſa. 28. 27, 28. *This cometh from the LORD, who is Wonderful in Counſel, and Excellent in Working.* Neither a Mans own Deſires or Inclinations, nor partial Reſpect to Perſons, ſhould guide us in this, but Experience of a juſt Proportion betwixt their Gifts and the Work, ſhould direct us: For miſ-application of Perſons to Places, hath been of very ill conſequence to the Church.

7. The choiceſt Perſons in our Aſſemblies are not to think themſelves too good to ſerve the Church of CHRIST, but when

when call'd, are to go on her Errands chearfully, as these Chosen Men here do: Men ought not to seek only Ease, Honour, and Advantage; but are call'd to Labour in the Vineyard, and the Great Shepherd will provide them their Reward.

8. Such Persons may be safely Trusted with the Important Interest of the Church, who have given proof of their hazarding their Lives for the Name of CHRIST: Men Deny'd to Themselves their Ease and Advantage; Men of Courage, who dare Engage in Difficulties, such Men will have a Native Care for it. Having therefore the SPIRIT promised to be our Guide, the Word of GOD given to be our Rule, and so Excellent a Pattern as this Assembly: Let us follow our Guide, according to the Rule, after so Holy an Example.

FINIS.